

The Air Expeditionary Force: Refining Deployment Practices

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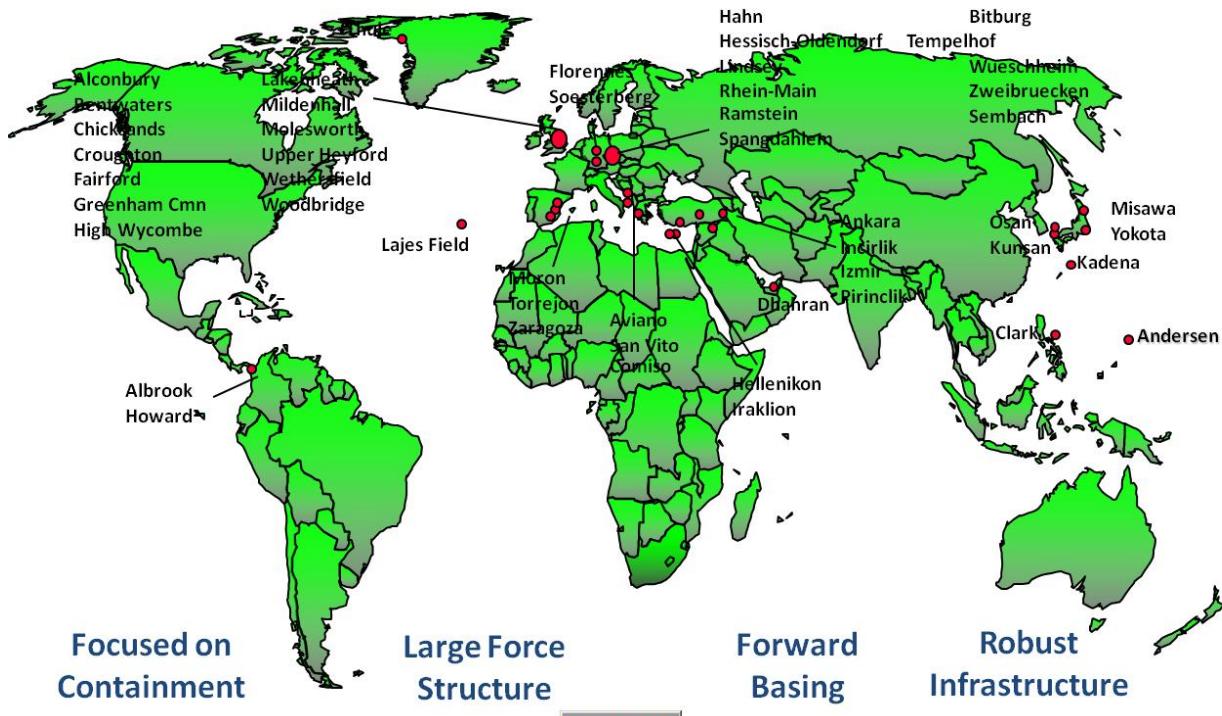
Today's asymmetric warfare environment requires innovative organizational approaches to ensure success. The Air Force should lengthen the AEF deployment period for officers and reduce its commitment to Army/Marine Corps "in lieu of" taskings to provide global vigilance, reach, and power to the battlefield.

Background

The Cold War was the Air Force's first theater engagement as a service since its creation in 1947. During this period, the conflict dictated that the Air Force install, operate and maintain very large, robust bases. Establishing large footprints throughout the world enabled the Air Force to project its global reach capability in an effort to focus on containing the Soviet Union.

AEF CONOPS

Cold War Basing

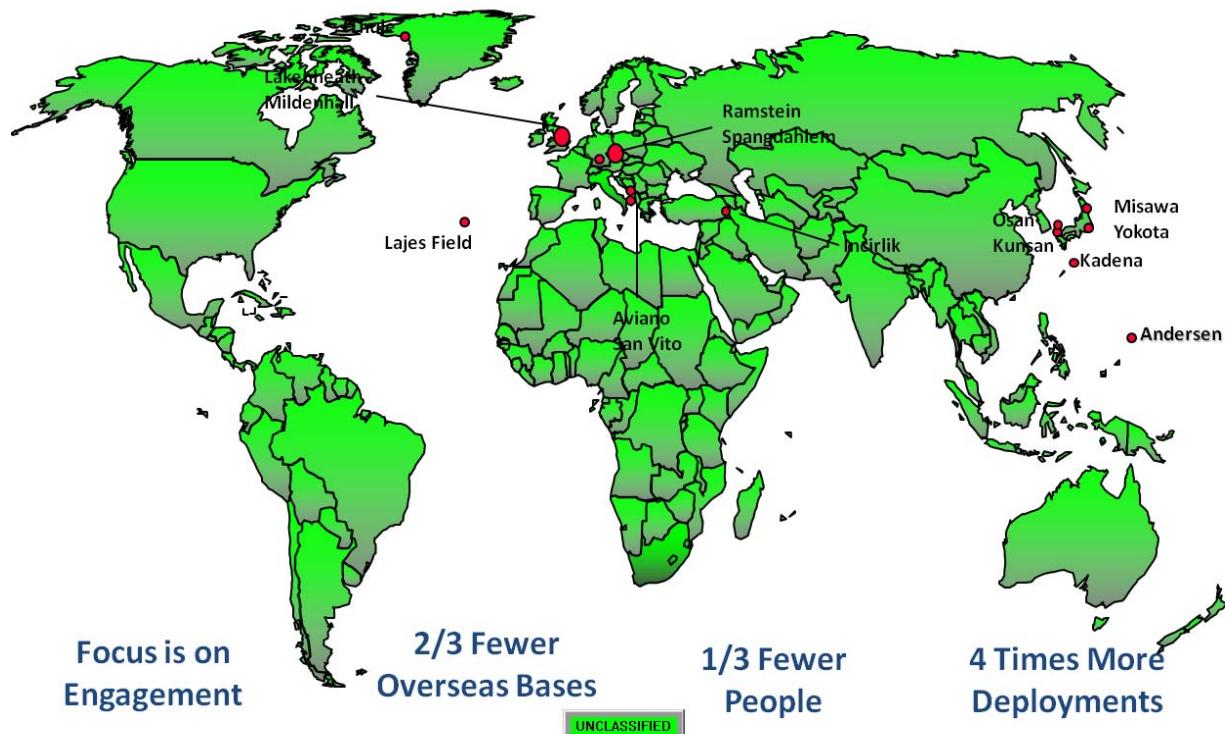


Reference 1

Today the Air Force is a fraction of the size it was during the height of the cold war era, consisting of two-thirds fewer overseas bases and one-third fewer personnel. As a result of the downsizing, the Air Force has moved away from large, robust bases to smaller contingency bases, refocusing its mission of engaging the adversary versus containing the enemy (i.e. Balad Air Base, Baghdad Air Base). The majority of personnel working at these units deploy from CONUS or other overseas locations and are not permanently assigned. While the Air Force maintains a smaller footprint at these expeditionary locations, at any given

time the number of locations may increase requiring more deployments from home base on a rotational basis.

AEF CONOPS Overseas Basing - Now



Reference 2

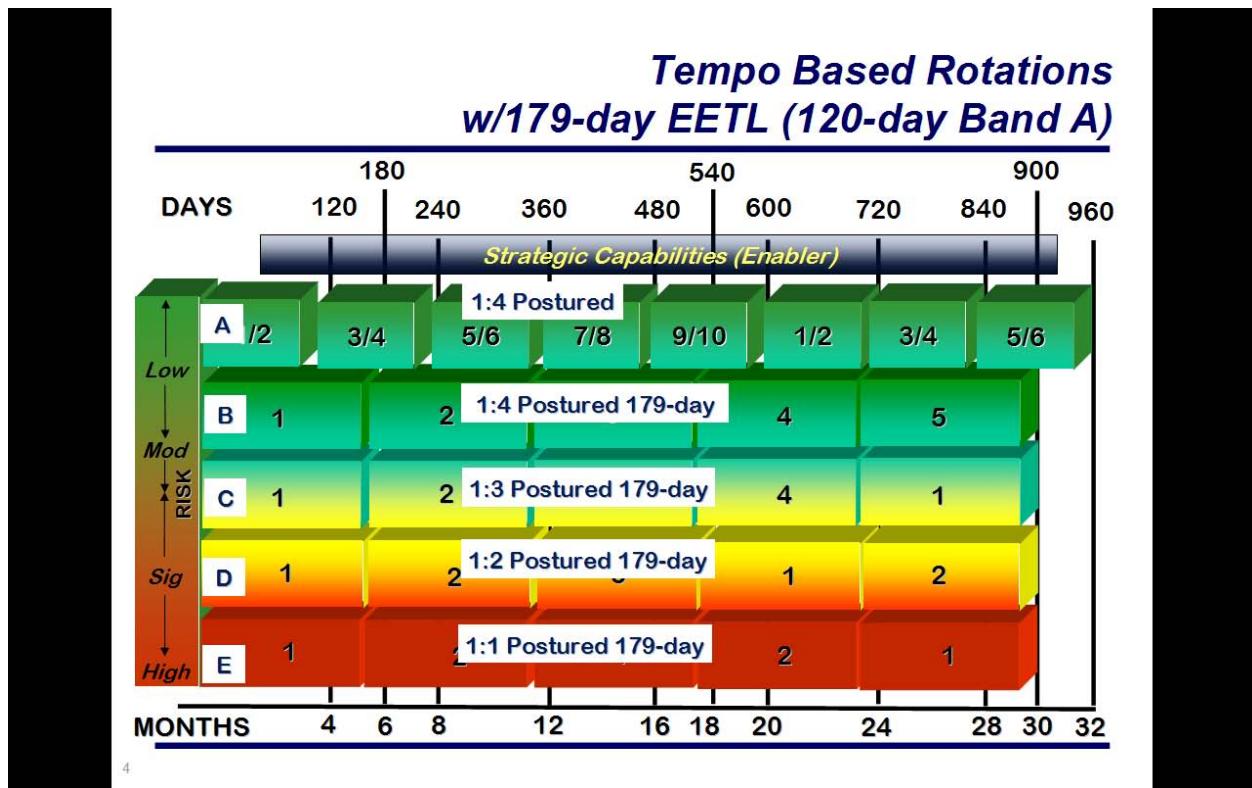
Current Deployment

In 1999, as a result of the extensive reduction in forces after the cold war, the Air Force established the Air and Space Expeditionary Force (AEF) deployment cycle for preparing and deploying its personnel to forward locations to meet combatant commander requirements. As defined in Air Force Doctrine Document-1 (AFDD-1):

the AEF [Air Expeditionary Force] is the mechanism for managing and scheduling forces for expeditionary use; the AETF [Air Expeditionary Task Force] is the Air Force warfighting organization presented to a JFC [Joint Forces Command].

The original framework of AEF deployment cycle consisted of four 90-day deployment periods. By assigning every Airman in the Air Force a deployment period, Airmen are postured to deploy once every 22 months for approximately 90 days.

Since its institution, the AEF deployment process has endured two major refinements: The first occurred in 2005 when the deployment period was lengthened to 120 days. The most recent change occurred in October 2008 by aligning the process in "bands" to meet the actual operational tempo and applying rule sets for low density, high demand career fields operating at a tempo less than a 1:4 deployment-dwell ratio.



Since its conception in 1999, the Air Force AEF process has played a pivotal role as a force provider and multiplier. As the operational tempo increased as a result of the Global War on Terrorism, the flexible nature of the AEF deployment process enhanced the speed at which Airmen were deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Today, the Air Force remains actively engaged in the Global War on Terrorism not only by continuing to fill Air Force mission taskings, but also by supporting Army and Marine Corps ILO taskings.

Current Tasking

As the operational tempo continues to increase each year since GWOT began in 2001, both Airmen and aircraft alike have

experienced the added strain. In 2007, the former Air Combat Command Commander, General Ronald Keys stated that the Air Force does not know what impacts will stem from the increased flying hours and the effects of the fine dust and extreme desert conditions the Air Force's aging airframes must continue to endure as a result of the amplified operational tempo.² As a result, the Air Force finds itself in a challenging situation, one that requires the service to balance its support for GWoT with its preparation for future fights by investing in modernized technology and focusing on innovative solutions to achieve the Air Force mission.

Similarly, the increased operational tempo has placed additional strain on the deployment process as a result of the Air Force's continued support of ILO deployments. *"Every day 53 percent of our Airmen are committed to a combatant commander, that's more than the Army, the Navy and the Marines."*³ Currently, ILO deployments require Airmen to augment traditional Army and Marine Corps duties. The ILO requirements were initially a "stop gap until the Army was able to train transporters, military police and engineers or contractors to fit with their doctrine to outsource and privatize."⁴ However, the Air Force's initial commitment of 1900 ILO has increased to nearly 8000 since 2004.⁵ In addition to the rise in the number of ILO taskings, the Air Force has

also been forced to bear not only the cost of training Airmen to deploy in these unconventional roles but also the cost of recertifying these personnel in their own specialty when they return. At the present time, it costs the Air Force three times as much to train, prepare, and recertify Airmen to deploy on one ILO deployment.⁶

In a November 2006 article, Gen Ronald Keys, Commander of Air Combat Command assured us that the AF is happy to offer its help to the Army during a time of need to fill ILO taskings, but

it's a problem, because I'm spending money to train my troops in skills I don't maintain in the U.S. Air Force...We are fine with doing that in order to give the Army the opportunity to reset their force, they are in a situation where they are trying to modularize their Army in the midst of a fairly huge war...They need to break loose some headroom. But it has been four years now, and there is no end in sight to the use of airmen in such unconventional roles.⁷

As the Air Force continues to shape its manpower requirements in an effort to reinvest in its aging fleet of aircraft, increased ILO taskings are forcing the Air Force to take a closer look at the financial costs of continuing to support these taskings. General Keys stated that this costs the Air Force upwards of three times as much in manpower when training, preparation, and recertification are considered. "We must watch closely to ensure we're not getting to the point where we can't maintain the job the Air Force needs do."³

Today, there is a growing fear in the Air Force -- one similar to the U.S. Marine Corps -- that if a long commitment for these ILO deployments develops, it may lead to an unwanted doctrine shift, away from its core mission to fly, fight and win in air, space and cyberspace and toward a role as a permanent combat service support provider to the Army.

Proposed Deployments

One of the many requirements an officer has when taking control of a new unit is to be brought up quickly to speed on the unit's history and command relationships. According to Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Peter Pace, "Tour lengths are the biggest obstacle to US troops morale in Iraq."⁸ Within the current construct of the 120-day deployments, Air Force leaders have found it challenging to adapt to their new deployed environment and at the same time establish a vision for their subordinates to execute. A 179-day deployment rotation would provide officers with a variety of advantages including continuity in the AOR and a predictable deployment schedule for Airmen and their families.

Increasing the length of officer deployments would further the Air Force's ability to provide continuity to deployed units. With officers and enlisted personnel currently sharing the same deployment rotation, it is difficult for leaders to understand

what has taken place during their predecessor's tenure. Without the knowledge of what actions, events, and policies that took place or are currently in place, the team replacing the deployed members is placed in a position of disadvantage. Instead of providing turnover with replacement teams four times a year under the current 120-day rotation cycle, the proposed 210-day deployment cycle for officers reduces turnover to only twice a year.

As a result of Congressional GWoT funding set to run out at the conclusion of fiscal year 2009, the Air Force will be forced to further refine its current processes to stretch its annual budget. Implementing a 179-day AEF deployment cycle for officers would also drive down the cost of training leaders prior to their deployment. The cost of training would be slashed by fifty-percent as Air Force officers would be deploying in two cycles instead of the four cycles in which they are currently rotating.

Counterargument

The opponents of my proposal argue that by extending the tour length for officers the Air Force would then have to deploy out its Airmen using two separate cycles. The "one cycle fits all" approach simplifies how Air Force major commands (MAJCOMs) task subordinate units for AEF deployments. The addition of a

separate cycle would reduce the simplistic approach to tasking officers for deployments.

Having a 210-day deployment cycle for officers would not complicate the deployment tasking process for the MAJCOMs. In order to reduce confusion when tasking the major commands could separate their "AEF Deployment Cells" into officer and enlisted taskings. Separating the tasking process would reduce tasking confusing and streamline how the MAJCOM staff manages its deployments.

An additional benefit of officers deploying for 210-day deployments would be that they would receive "short tour" credit and in some cases "joint" credit depending on what duty assignment they had in their deployed location. Extending the deployment lengths for Air Force officers would allow them to gain valuable deployed experience in which they could apply in their in garrison assignment.

Conclusion

Lengthening the current 120-day AEF deployment cycle to a 210-day deployment cycle for Air Force officers while at the same time, reducing ILO taskings will enhance the Air Forces overall capability of providing global vigilance, reach and power to the battlefield. Deploying for longer periods of time, officers will be given a better opportunity to provide

continuity to one another as they transition into and out of the area of operation (AOR). Additional time in the AOR will provide officers with a greater sense of the current operating environment and will enable them to lead their Airmen in support of GWoT more effectively upon their return to their in garrison assignments.

Reducing the number of Army/Marine Corps ILO taskings filled by Airmen will allow Airmen to fill duties within their traditional deployed roles. In addition, by decreasing the amount of ILO taskings filled by Airmen, the Air Force will be able to use the funding that previously went to train Airmen supporting ILO taskings to modernize its aging air and space inventory, a priority on Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General Norman Schwartz.

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Footnotes

1 Air Force Doctrine Document -1, 2003.

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3 Former Air Force Chief of Staff, General Michael T. Moseley, 10, quoted in Staff Sergeant Matthew Bates., "Senior Leaders Address Deployments, Total-Force Concept."

4 Former Air Force Air Combat Command Commander, General Ronald Keyes, 9, quoted in Colonel Dan Richards., "Expeditionary Wing Leadership Lessons Learned Exit Interviews."

5 Keys quoted in Boskers "ACC leader: Air Force must balance resources, look ahead."

6 Keys quoted in Boskers "ACC leader: Air Force must balance resources, look ahead."

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8 Former Charimen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Peter Pace, 14, quoted in Jim Garamone., "Pace Says Differing Tour Lengths Affect Deployment Morale."